

The Face of GREEN

MEET 6 PEOPLE WHO ARE RAISING MILWAUKEE'S ECO IQ

BY JANET RAASCH

During the last decade-plus, Milwaukee has been quietly growing a reputation around the Midwest and beyond as a leader in the green movement. Some of it has been well-documented (think Will Allen's Growing Power), but much of our forward approach to food, water and the built environment has been accomplished in our uniquely Milwaukee way: with hard work and little fanfare. Here is a snapshot of just a few of the people behind the efforts.

Matt Howard
Director
Milwaukee Office
of Environmental
Sustainability

People, planet, profits: That's the simple explanation of Matt Howard's job as director of the Office of Environmental Sustainability. He took over the job about two years ago after more than a decade in Washington, D.C., working for the U.S. Department of Commerce. Mayor Tom Barrett created the office in 2006, which is 100 percent funded by grants. In addition to helping the city, businesses and residents operate more efficiently and environmentally soundly, Howard is leading the mayor's newly appointed 15-member Green Team, which in the next year will develop a detailed sustainability plan for the city.

M: How are sustainability efforts and economic growth tied together?

MH: At its most basic, sustainability really deals with inefficiencies, removing waste, and better use and management of resources. We see it play out in Milwaukee in the manufacturing sector. Any way those manufacturers can cut costs is a way for them to be more competitive. A positive environmental impact of polluting

less means less waste is going into landfills. It's a win-win from my point of view and the mayor's point of view.

M: What is your top priority?

MH: If I had to prioritize, my No. 1 priority is working internally on city government energy use and our own sustainability. We must lead by example. I spend a lot of time delving into our energy use. We have thousands of traffic and street lights, for example, and it's taxpayers' dollars supporting that electric bill.

M: How does Milwaukee rate in comparison to other cities on the sustainability front?

MH: I will defend to the death that I think Milwaukee is a top 10 city. The city has quiet history of just doing things and tends not to talk about it. We are really good at doing a lot of things really well: the water issue; our urban agricultural scene; the manufacturing scene; recycling; our sewerage district is one of the best in the country; our residential energy efficiency program is one of the best and most comprehensive in the country. We've got a long way we can still go, but we are doing a lot better than we give ourselves credit for.

Tim O'Brien
President
Tim O'Brien Homes

Since starting Tim O'Brien homes in 2007 with partner Matt Neumann, the company that touts green-built homes has received numerous accolades: MBA 2011 Builder of the Year, winner of the Parade of Homes People's Choice Award three years in a row and the top single-family home builder in 2011. "Our mission has been to make it more mainstream, available to everyone at an affordable price," says O'Brien, a civil engineer turned home builder. "Our goal is not to be the biggest builder, we just got there."

M: What does green building mean?

TO: Green building is a holistic systems approach to building a home. A home is a system, not a bunch of pieces and parts to put together. All of the pieces put into it affect one another. When you understand the relationship, the better chance you have of building a high-performance home at a better price. (There are) four tenets of green building: energy efficiency, resource conservation, water conservation and indoor air quality.

M: What are the biggest misconceptions about green building?

TO: That it's expensive; that you must have geothermal or solar systems to be green; that it's individual pieces.

M: What is the No. 1 thing a homeowner can do to be "green?"

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Lindsay Stevens Gardner

Founder and Executive Director
Rock the Green music festival

With temperatures in the 40s and sideways rain pelting the nearly 7,300 festival-goers to the inaugural Rock the Green near zero-waste musical festival in Milwaukee last fall, founder Lindsay Stevens Gardner admits it wasn't the sunny skies she envisioned, but everyone left feeling good. "It was almost like that Woodstock moment," she says. "It's raining, but who cares. It was so awesome and very memorable."

Stevens Gardner, a University School of Milwaukee grad who lived in Denver and San Francisco before returning to the North Shore in 2002, has an extensive event marketing background, coordinating live events for the likes of Nike and Anheuser-Busch. She started planning RtG in 2008. She likens the starts and stops to her competitive rock climbing days: slow and steady. "You just keep going because you are going to get to the top eventually."

This year's event is set for Sept. 15.

M: What inspired you to create Rock the Green?

LSG: I'm very passionate about the outdoors, the environment and music. It just seems like a natural event to bring those together to have this experience. Everyone is in this environment having a great time, where they are learning and inspired to take charge in their own lives. I wanted to do something fresh and unique that hasn't been done before. I wanted to show you can do a massive event without leaving a massive footprint.

M: What are some of the success stories from RtG?

- LSG:**
- Ninety-two percent of the waste generated at the event was reduced, reused or recycled.
 - 440 pounds of waste was sent to the landfill — the equivalent of just 10 trash cans as opposed to 3.5 tons as per the EPA. That's less than one ounce per person.
 - Concert-goers consumed more than 750 gallons of water. Using recyclable and reusable water bottles at the festival helped save the equivalent of 5,750 plastic water bottles from going to landfill.
 - We took the entire event off the grid with bio-diesel fuel, solar and pedal power. We are including wind power this year.
 - More than 50 companies were involved, including Veolia Environmental Services as the title sponsor.

M: What is the long-term goal for this festival?

LSG: We want to inspire other events to be more eco friendly. They don't have to do everything like we did, but every step counts. Ultimately I want to grow this to be the Farm Aid (of eco festivals) as one big massive event and move it to other markets.

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Executive Director
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As head of the 300-member nonprofit WGBA, Heather McCombs and two staff members provide resources and programming to promote ecologically sustainable practices within Wisconsin's built environment. And the response has been encouraging. "Having 25 people register in the first day of advertising for a new program that we spent two months developing brings the importance of our work full circle," she says.

M: Why are you passionate about promoting green building efforts throughout the state?

HM: I see it as one of the solutions to revitalizing not just the state economy but the nation's economy. Knowing that the work we do every day directly contributes to helping people learn new sustainable building and design practices that will get them into the new global economy is really energizing.

M: Is Wisconsin considered a leader in the Midwest in promoting ecologically sustainable practices?

HM: Wisconsin is considered a quiet leader in that the state is filled with large companies that have quietly practiced solid corporate responsibility and triple bottom line thinking for decades. Companies like Kohler, Johnson Controls, Quad/Graphics, Briggs & Stratton, Kimberly Clark, Lands' End and MillerCoors are just a few examples of Wisconsin companies that practice social responsibility and environmental stewardship from a stakeholder perspective rather than the traditional shareholder perspective. This is one of the reasons great companies like Ingeteam are choosing to locate in Milwaukee.

M: What are the important elements in a building project to be "green?"

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- Selecting a high density location to reduce emissions caused by transportation
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M: In a perfect "green" world, everyone would ...

HM: Practice some aspect of social responsibility.

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